

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 382 618

SP 035 990

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TITLE Moral Reasoning of Division III and Division I Athletes: Is There a Difference?
PUB DATE 30 Mar 95
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Alliance of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (Portland, OR, March 30, 1995).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports -- Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Athletes; *College Athletics; College Students; Competition; Ethics; Higher Education; *Moral Development; Moral Values; Sport Psychology; *Student Attitudes; *Student Subcultures; Student Surveys
IDENTIFIERS *Student Athletes

ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine the potentially corrupting influences of media attention, money, and the accompanying stress on the moral reasoning of student athletes at both Division I and Division III National College Athletics Association (NCAA) schools. Subjects were 718 nonathletes and 277 randomly selected athletes at a Division I school and 206 nonathletes and 387 athletes at 8 Division III schools. All subjects completed the Hahn-Beller Values Choice Inventory in the Sport Milieu. Scores of nonathletes at both Division I and Division III schools were significantly higher than those of athletes in both Divisions. Results are found to indicate that perhaps it is not money, national prestige, coaches' salaries, or glamor that affects the moral reasoning of athletes, but how competitive activity is viewed. Perhaps the culprit for deficient moral reasoning among student athletes is the exclusionary, selfish, rule-bound perception of competition and the practice of objectifying opponents, dissociating self from personal responsibility, and perceiving sport as a means to personal gain. Sports participation and competition as it is now taught and modeled, in and of itself, may negatively impact moral reasoning, and the involvement of national media and corporate sponsors may not significantly increase this effect. (Contains 29 references.) (PB)

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Moral Reasoning of Division III and Division I Athletes: Is there a difference?

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RUNNING HEAD: A Comparison of Athletes in Division I and Division III Institutions

Moral Reasoning of Division III and Division I Athletes: Is there a difference?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to compare moral reasoning scores of student athletes who compete in two different levels of collegiate athletic competition, Division I and Division III NCAA schools. We have done various studies of moral reasoning of Division I-A and Division I-AA athletes over the past ten years. We basically have concluded that moral reasoning of student athletes in Division I sport are adversely affected by the competitive experience. We often have been queried about the level of moral reasoning of Division III athletes. Typically, the perennial myth is the moral reasoning of student athletes in Division III would be higher than Division I. The argument is based on the he belief that money is the root of all evil, which in turn causes undue tension and stress on athletes to win-at-all-costs. However, given the conditions of Division III athletics, no scholarships, no high coaching salaries, no excessive trappings, no or little national media attention, small athletic budges; the athletes would therefore be free of the win-at-all-cost dilemma and hence would be at a higher level of moral reasoning. In 1993, we did two separate studies comparing moral reasoning of student athletes and general students (nonathletes) at two different levels of competition, Division I and III. Subjects were randomly selected 718 nonathletes and 277 athletes at a Division I school and 206 nonathletes and 387 athletes at 8 Division III schools. All subjects were evaluated with the Hahm-Beller Values Choice Inventory in the Sport Milieu (HBVCI), a valid and reliable (Cronbach Alpha 0.74-0.86) tool for measuring moral reasoning. In study one (Division I), nonathletes ($M=69.24$, $SD \pm 10.81$) were significantly

higher than athletes ($M=63.97$, $SD \pm 11.08$) ($F[1,993]47.25$ $p \leq .0001$). In study two, Division III, nonathletes ($M=73.96$, $SD \pm 10.58$) were significantly higher than athletes ($M=68.68$, $SD \pm 10.45$), ($F[1,591] 33.99$ $p < .0001$). The data implies that participation in athletics, either at a Division I or Division III, adversely affects moral reasoning. It appears that something about sport competition, as it is practiced today, not money, is the culprit.

Introduction

For the past ten years we have conducted various analytical and descriptive studies of moral reasoning of Division I-A and Division I-AA athletes. Our original hypothesis, that competitive athletics as practiced, modeled, and taught in America today adversely affects moral reasoning of participants, has been supported (Stoll & Beller, 1995; Beller & Stoll, 1995; Lumpkin, Stoll, & Beller, 1995; Beller & Stoll, Tentative Acceptance; Stoll & Beller, 1993; Beller & Stoll, 1993). The data that we reported is not revolutionary as it may, because what we found is generally supported from other research over the last forty years (Bredemeier & Shields, 1986; Richardson, 1982; Allison, 1981; Hall, 1981; Kroll, 1975; Stevenson, 1975; Kroll, 1975; Olgilvie & Tutko, 1971; Lakie, 1964; Boyver, 1963; Kistler, 1957).

We have always theorized that competition in and of itself is not the actual culprit that adversely affects moral reasoning and moral development of athlete populations (Lumpkin, Stoll, & Beller, 1995). Rather, we believe that it is how all of us in the sport business interpret competition to be the real villain. It appears that we literally believe that competition is as Keating (1965) described, ...a seeking after something of value (the win), to the exclusion of others (ours alone), while following agreed upon rules (rule-bound). If we view competition in such a light, it becomes an easy step to violate others while justifying the action (Lumpkin, Stoll, & Beller, 1995). We have posited that because competition is viewed as such, moral reasoning is directly affected. We have also hypothesized that this condition probably occurs in every level of competition from youth sport to collegiate sport (Beller & Stoll, Tentative Acceptance).

However, whenever we present our data, we are always queried about the level of moral reasoning of Division III athletes. Proponents of small school athletic programs passionately argue that what we find in big-time athletics is not true in Division III. The argument usually follows this course. The purpose of Division I athletics is winning games and making money. Because Division I is big-business, it is no wonder that competition is viewed as exclusionary, rule bound, and valued only for the win. However, given the conditions of Division III athletics, -- no scholarships, no high coaching salaries, no excessive trappings, little or no national media attention, small athletic budgets -- competition is not viewed as exclusionary, rule-bound, or win-at-all-costs. Hence, the moral reasoning of Division III athletes would not be adversely affected by the competitive experience in small colleges..

We have even heard it argued that Division III athletics is truly the ideal. This truly ideal perception would support the general philosophic concept put forth by Robert Simon (1993) that competition is a "mutual question for excellence through challenge". If Division III athletics is truly the ideal, the moral reasoning of athletes would be as high or higher than the general student population of that institution. We wondered if all of this was true. Are we wrong in our theory that competition is not the problem - money is? Would we find that athletes in a Division III NCAA programs no different in their moral reasoning than general students? Would we find that the difference in moral reasoning of athletes at Division I institutions is solely a result of an environment in which winning is the only value? To address these questions, we developed a study in which the purpose was to compare moral reasoning scores of student athletes who compete in two different levels of collegiate athletic

competition, Division I and Division III NCAA schools.

Methodology

In 1993 to answer the above, we conducted two separate studies comparing moral reasoning of student athletes and general students (nonathletes) at two different levels of competition, Division I and Division III.

Selection of Subjects:

Subjects were 718 college age nonathletes and 277 athletes at a Division I university and 206 randomly selected college age nonathletes and 387 athletes at eight Division III schools. All subjects signed letters of informed consent and were evaluated with the Hahm-Beller Values Choice Inventory in the Sport Milieu (HBVCI) (Hahm, Beller, & Stoll, 1989). In the Division I university, male and female athletes were all freshman intercollegiate team and individual sport participants; non athletes were all incoming freshman students. In the Division III colleges, male and female athletes were randomly selected from team and individual sports; nonathletes were randomly selected from general university courses.

The Instrument

The HBVCI is a reliable (Cronbach Alpha 0.74 - 0.86) instrument to measure moral reasoning in the sport context. (Beller, Stoll, & Hahm, 1993). The HBVCI is comprised of 21 questions that ask participants to answer using a Likert Scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree (Hahm, 1989; Hahm, Beller & Stoll, 1989). The scenarios ask participants to reason critically about various common moral dilemmas in sport, i.e., the implications of the intentional foul, performance-enhancing drug use, drug testing, retaliation, responsibility for personal action, and fairness to teammates and

competitors. Higher scores reflect a consistent use of moral principles and reasoning which can be universally applied. For clarification, "[m]oral reasoning is the ability to systematically think through a moral problem taking into consideration one's own values and beliefs while weighing them against what others and society values and believes" (Lumpkin, Stoll, & Beller, 1995).

Testing Protocol:

All subjects were tested as a group at their respective schools. Each student was given a copy of the Hahm-Beller Values Choice inventory. For consistency in test administration, test instructions were read to each group. Participants were told that no right or wrong answers exist, they should independently read and answer the questions based on their personal feelings or beliefs. All participants completed the inventories within the 45 minute allotted time.

Data Analysis

A Oneway ANOVA in SPSS was used to detect differences among groups (athlete versus nonathlete), with alpha set at $p < .05$ for each study. Sums of the twenty-one questions were used to give a total score.

Results

In study one (Division I), nonathletes ($M = 69.24$, $SD \pm 10.81$) were significantly higher in their moral reasoning as compared to athletes ($M = 63.97$, $SD \pm 11.08$) ($F[1,993] = 47.25$, $p < .0001$).

Insert Figure 1 about here

In study two, Division III, nonathletes ($M=73.96$, $SD \pm 10.58$) were significantly higher than athletes ($M = 68.68$, $SD \pm 10.45$), ($F[1,591] 33.99$ $p < .0001$).

Insert Figure 2 about here

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to compare moral reasoning scores of student athletes who compete in two different levels of collegiate athletic competition, Division I and Division III NCAA schools. The research questions we wished to address were: Are we wrong in our theory that competition is not the problem - money is? Are athletes in a Division III NCAA programs significantly different in moral reasoning than their peer populations? If there is a difference, could it be for the same reasons as those differences in Division I NCAA athletes?

It appears that Division III athletes are significantly different in their moral reasoning than their peer groups. At the same time, athletes in Division I institutions are significantly different in their moral reasoning from their peers. Interestingly, if we review the difference between Division I athletes and their peer groups, and the difference between Division III athletes and their peer groups, the magnitude of difference is about the same. Our findings support support Hahm's (1989), Penny & Priest's (1990), Beller's (1990), and the USAFA (1994) findings using the HBVCI.

Several philosophical reasons may exist to explain these differences in reasoning between athletes and non-athletes. First, athletics in America is typically characterized by: "Competitiveness, contention of interest, physical skill, and prowess" (Thomas, 1983). The philosophical implication is the perception that competition is "exclusionary and selfish". This negative perception of competition coupled with the intense nature of interscholastic athletics may cause athletes to perceive instrumental values (i.e. winning, fame, and prestige) as more important than competing to the idealistic perception of one's best ability. Because of this high instrumental orientation, athletes may be unable to distance themselves from the competitive activity, to make consistent rational moral judgments.

Further, these results may be related to what Bredemeier (1984) states:

is a tendency to objectify one's opponents, project responsibility for moral decision making onto coaches and officials, and take an unbalanced interest in one's own gain. (p. 10)

Therefore the selfish need to win, no matter that it is at Division I or Division III, with the so-called win-at-all-cost model, causes a disproportionate emphasis and importance on the win, to the exclusion of all other criteria.

This condition is also supported by the perceived importance of athletics by those around the athlete. Even at Division III institutions, athletics is perceived to have great importance in the relative scheme of college events. Presidents at Division III institutions view athletics as an important social function (Bailey & Littleton, 1991). Besides the perceived social importance, the amount of work or effort dedicated toward athletics is great. Even though the NCAA limits an athlete's practice time to 20 hours per week, many spend

sometimes upwards of 40-60 hours per week involved in some aspect of their sport, whether it is practices, rehabilitation, weight training, or viewing of films. The environment supports the perception that athletics is important, more important than any other function.

There is also a mis-perception that athletics at Division III institutions are pure with no instances of cheating. Bailey & Littleton (1991) surveyed college presidents in their work on athletics in academia.

Although abuses appear to be more common and serious among institutions in Division I, because of their visibility, violations do in fact occur in Divisions II and III, where the opportunity for corruption, especially in Division III, may be enhanced because of relative neglect by NCAA enforcement attention. Indeed, violations appear to be more common than is generally recognized. (p. 22).

Do these results, however, mean that Division I or Division III athletes are less moral or less morally reasoned than non-athletes? Perhaps, perhaps not. Beller and Stoll (1993) and Stoll & Beller (1994) recently suggested that athlete moral reasoning and moral development scores do appear to arrest or even negatively decline with participation, however, intense intervention reverses the downward spiral. The rate of return to normalcy is so abrupt as to suggest that development was not actually arrested (Beller & Stoll, Tentative Acceptance). They suggest that what may be occurring is a masking of moral decision making. That is, it is easier to cope by not having to think about weighty issues.

A final note about our study. Some may question the validity of the current study in that we appear to have confounding variables in that the two studies measured different types of subjects: The Division I school sample was only incoming freshmen, ages 17-18; whereas

the Division III school sample was of all grade-levels and ages from 18 - 26 years. We, however, do not think that these two different types of samples are confounding, rather we believe they are somewhat alike. In the Division I sample, the students in question were enrolled in one of the elite academic institutions in America. They were evaluated with the HBVCI, the first week enrolled. To enroll in this institution, the student supposedly holds certain values and beliefs that are universal to the institution and consistent with the role and mission of academics and athletics: The ideal scholar athlete. At the same time, the Division III schools also hold to this notion of the Ideal scholar athlete. Our samples therefore held similar beliefs yet played at different divisions -- therefore, we argue that the samples by their different ages and classes would be more alike than different and the samples would not confound the results.

Summary

The data gives us food for thought concerning athletic participation in non-revenue generating programs. The data also gives us much to think about in condemning money as the root of all evil. Perhaps money is not the harbinger of evil, but rather how we all perceive the importance of winning, succeeding, or even being special in an activity.

The data implies and supports the past forty years of research (Stoll & Beller, 1995; Beller & Stoll, 1995; Lumpkin, Stoll, & Beller, 1995; Beller & Stoll, Tentative Acceptance; Stoll & Beller, 1993; Beller & Stoll, 1993; Bredemeier & Shields, 1986; Richardson, 1982; Allison, 1981; Hall, 1981; Kroll, 1975; Stevenson, 1975; Kroll, 1975; Olgilvie & Tutko, 1971; Lakie, 1964; Boyver, 1963; Kistler, 1957) that participation in athletics adversely affects moral reasoning. It does not appear that any difference exists when comparing

moral reasoning of Division I or Division III. Perhaps it is not money, national prestige, coaches salaries, or glamour that affects the reasoning process of athletes. Perhaps it is how we perceive the competitive activity, one that is exclusionary, selfish, rule bound and objective that is the culprit. Perhaps it is our practice of objectifying opponents, dissociating self from personal responsibility, and perceiving sport as a means to personal gain that overshadows the perceived ideal environment (Bredemeier, 1984).

The present research also supports the general conclusions of past writers that, athletics as it is now taught and modeled, in and of itself, does not cognitively build moral character. The research is really not exceptional nor revolutionary considering all of the past research in other venues and arenas about sport, but there is a sad editorial comment to all of this. After almost five decades of research, we in the business of moral education research have not convinced coaches and sport practitioners, no matter the level of participation, that the present competitive model is doing more harm than good. Sport enthusiasts and participants appear blind to the reality of the present, dismiss the research, and inadvertently promote the status quo, win-at-all-cost competitive spirit. Essentially, the mystique of playing the game takes precedence over critical analysis.

Future research must be focused toward a remedy to the problems of research credibility as well as the credibility of moral education intervention programs for both athletes and coaches.

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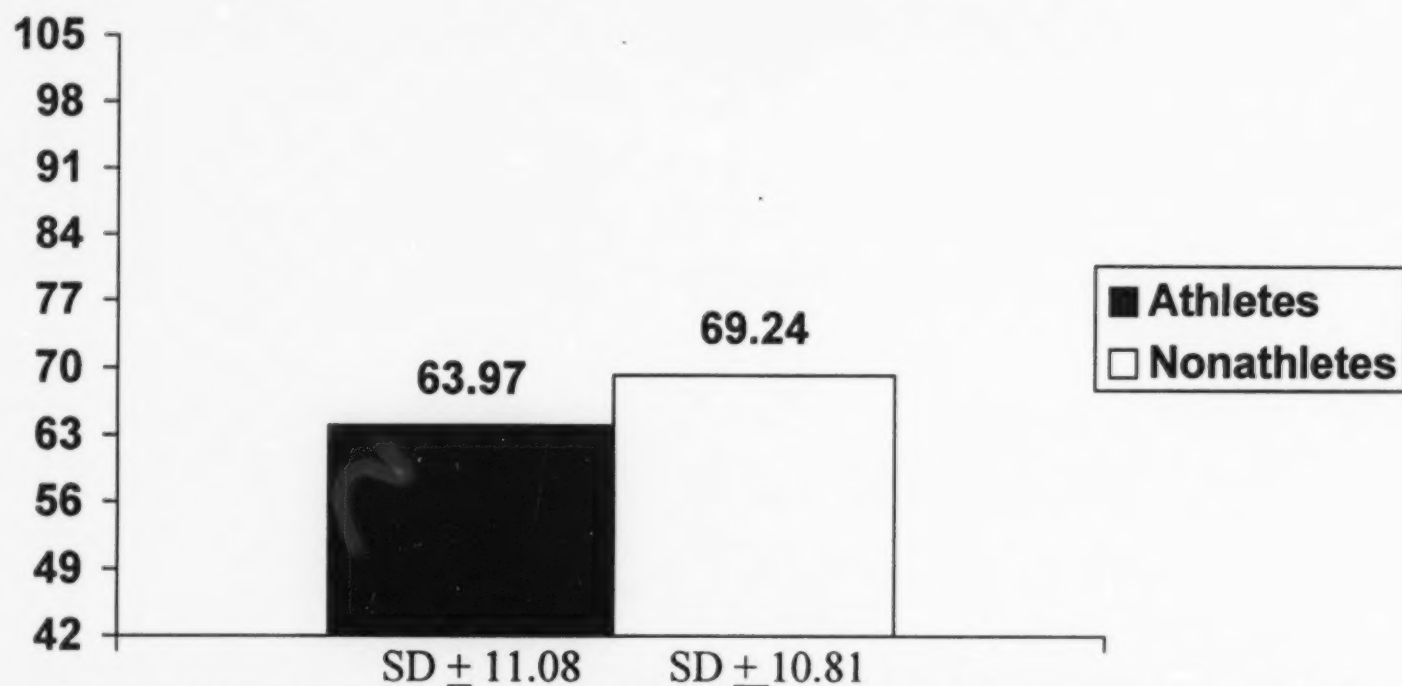
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Figure 1.

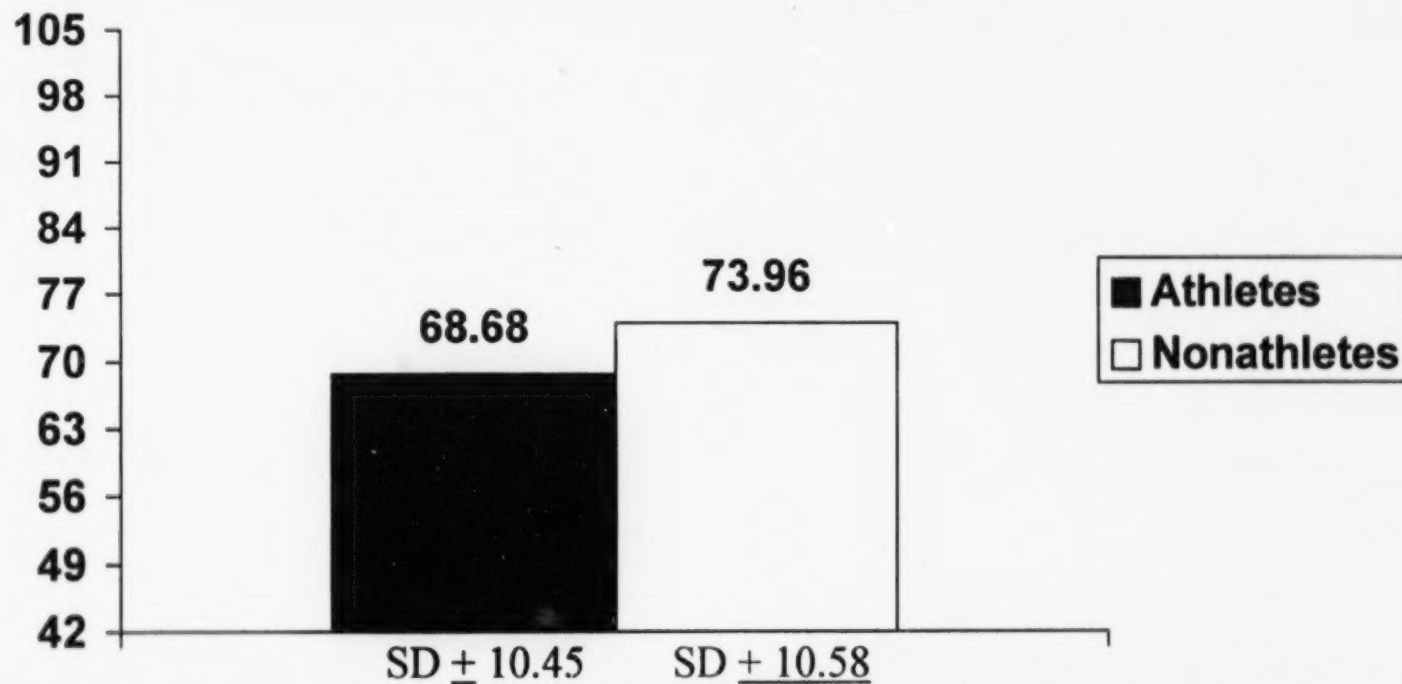
Division I HBVCI Moral Reasoning Scores: Athletes versus Nonathletes



Note: Athletes are significantly different than nonathletes at the $p < .0001$ level.

Figure 2.

Division III HBVCI Moral Reasoning Scores: Athletes versus Nonathletes



Note: Athletes are significantly different than nonathletes at the $p < .0001$ level.